

Immersion in nonhuman worlds

As individuals with a passion for cats, Alexander Mikhaylov (D3mark0) and I sought to deepen our understanding of these fascinating creatures and our connections with them. To achieve this, we created a [digital interactive city](#) using the Unity game engine.

It is a place solely inhabited by cats, where they live freely and independently. Their actions are not subject to the player's will and may even hinder the player by disrupting game animations and consuming all personal computer resources.

In this city, the player undergoes a transformation. His-her vision becomes more sensitive in the dark, and the world around him-her takes on a blue-green hue. His-her body position shifts to that of a quadruped, and his-her gait acquires an extraordinary grace.

He-she wanders around the city as a local and comes across pictures taken by cats along the roads. These shots capture moments from the cats' life, including the careful exploration of their surroundings, skilful hunting of animals, and keen observation of humans.

The player can jump onto the roofs of buildings and continue his-her walk. From up there, he-she will see pictures frozen in the air, depicting still lifes of cats' favourite things, as well as footage of their antics and adventures.

At the top, the player can also discover the hidden corners of the city. These spaces showcase archival photographs that reveal the close relationship between the person and the cats. Some of the cat images are heavily cropped and enlarged, resulting in a blurry effect that reflects the limitations of human memory and feline farsightedness. In another corner, there are concise poetic notes written by the person captured in the archival footage, discussing the time spent with the cats and their impact.

Our virtual work responds to the growing popularity of video clips recorded with action cameras attached to cats' collars on [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#), as well as the creation of a special [filter in TikTok](#) that mimics cats' colour perception. This trend highlights the evolving role of cats in digital culture, transitioning from being objects of the human gaze to subjects. Our game reflects this trend by allowing the player to experience feline agency.

Captions for the photos in the slideshow

1. The entrance to a city created in 2022 in collaboration with artist Alexander Mikhaylov (D3mark0) for [my photography project 'My Nonhuman Friends'](#).
2. Still life with a dry twig, a cat's toy.
3. Archival photo of a cat in a courtyard.
4. The cat is looking at a still life with a cockroach and claws.
5. An image of torn paper frozen in the air.
6. Archival photos of the person and the cats in the courtyard.
7. The cats are looking at the consequences of their mischievous behaviour.
8. A photograph captured by a cat watching a human.
9. The photograph, which is an enlarged archival image of a cat's wool.
10. A photograph captured by a cat during a hunt.
11. The photograph, which is an enlarged archival image of a cat's whiskers.
12. Cats and a still life with a comb and wool.
13. Poetic notes in a courtyard.
14. Cats and still lifes with their favourite objects.

Nika Sandler is a visual artist who explores themes related to the human and non-human gaze and post-photography.

Alexander Mikhaylov (D3mark0) is the artist, owner, and curator of Krasnaya Gallery.